

White Pines State Park

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Slightly outside of Oregon there lies a hidden treasure among the southern most tip of the white pine forests. It is a state park that lies within the valley between Polo and Oregon. Deeply steeped in a rich history, the area boasts the beauty of nature and luxury of cabins. The region is in the heart of Black Hawk Indian territory. Black Hawk's followers fought off many of the settlers until the Black Hawk War forced them out of their land. The park was created from the best interests of the people for the conservation of the natural resources of Ogle County. The park's many areas were the results of Depression-based government work camps, such as the CCC. White Pines is a home to many animals and flora that is found nowhere else in nature. Today the park offers many attractions to everyone. In all, the park is a great addition to Illinois and the surrounding communities.

The people in the surrounding community worked hard to preserve the southern-most region of white pine forests. White Pines forest was still just a plot of land until a group of conservationists in Ogle County petitioned for a state grant to build up the park. "This 700-acre forest of untouched pine extended for almost a ¼ mile" stated the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The citizens pushed for legislature that would appropriate \$30,000 for the purchase of the land. It was vetoed in 1903, but in 1927 they had more success. The area was sanctioned as a state park and achieved nature preservation status. Jens Jenson, who led several of these "conservational missions" explained the movement, "scenic regions possess little agricultural value, but much 'museum' value."

The Civilian Conservation Corps played a major role in improving the accessibility and comfort of the park. The era of this construction was during the Great Depression in the years of 1933 through 1939. This organization was created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to supplement millions of young men across America with jobs. “enroll them in a peacetime army, and send them into battle against destruction and erosion of our natural resources” according to the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni or (NACCCA). This government sanctioned public works project built many of the shelters, foot bridges, cabins, and the lodge. Although some of the materials came from as far away as the State of Washington, they incorporated many of the parks’ natural features, such as native fieldstone and pine timbers up to 70 feet long. The original plan for the road construction was to have five bridges spanning Pine Creek. A more economic solution was to build fords or simple concrete upraising for cars to drive over. As written in the brochure, “Through the years this has proven to be one of the park’s most unique features.”

The park is home to an abundance of creatures. These “unglaciaded woods” are home to many plants that exist nowhere else in the world. Some plants in this region are some of the few that are left in nature. Such examples are the white birch and the small yellow lady’s-slipper. The animals home to this region include small mammals, and migratory birds. The woods provide a good home to any creature that lives there. Naturalist Michael Jeffords wrote, “[Northern Illinois] became known as the ‘Driftless Area,’ an island that had escaped the great continental glaciers.” This let many animals survive the ice age and continue to today. The topography of tributaries such as Pine and

Spring creek adds to the ecosystem of the park, Jeffords described this also. “These and their tributaries form an intricate web . . . thickly carpeted with forests.”

Today the park consists of many attractions for travelers and nature lovers. Seven hiking trails spanning over 5 miles of outdoor terrain, the park boasts of hikers being able to watch deer, if they are quiet. The original rustic cabins still remain after decades of use, this is where people write down and can read journals that others have left behind. The park was built because of community interest and the Depression. It has grown to attract many from Chicago and farther. Without community action, the southern most tip of the White Pines would be lost forever. [From Keith Call, *Images of American Oregon, Illinois*; Michael R. Jeffords, et al., *Illinois Wilds*; *Illinois, A Descriptive and Historical Guide*; and *White Pines Forest-State Park*. 2003. Illinois Department of Natural Resources. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R1/WHITEPNS.HTM>>. (Oct. 15, 2006).]